



The CANADIAN COURIER

The National Weekly



Vol. XIII.

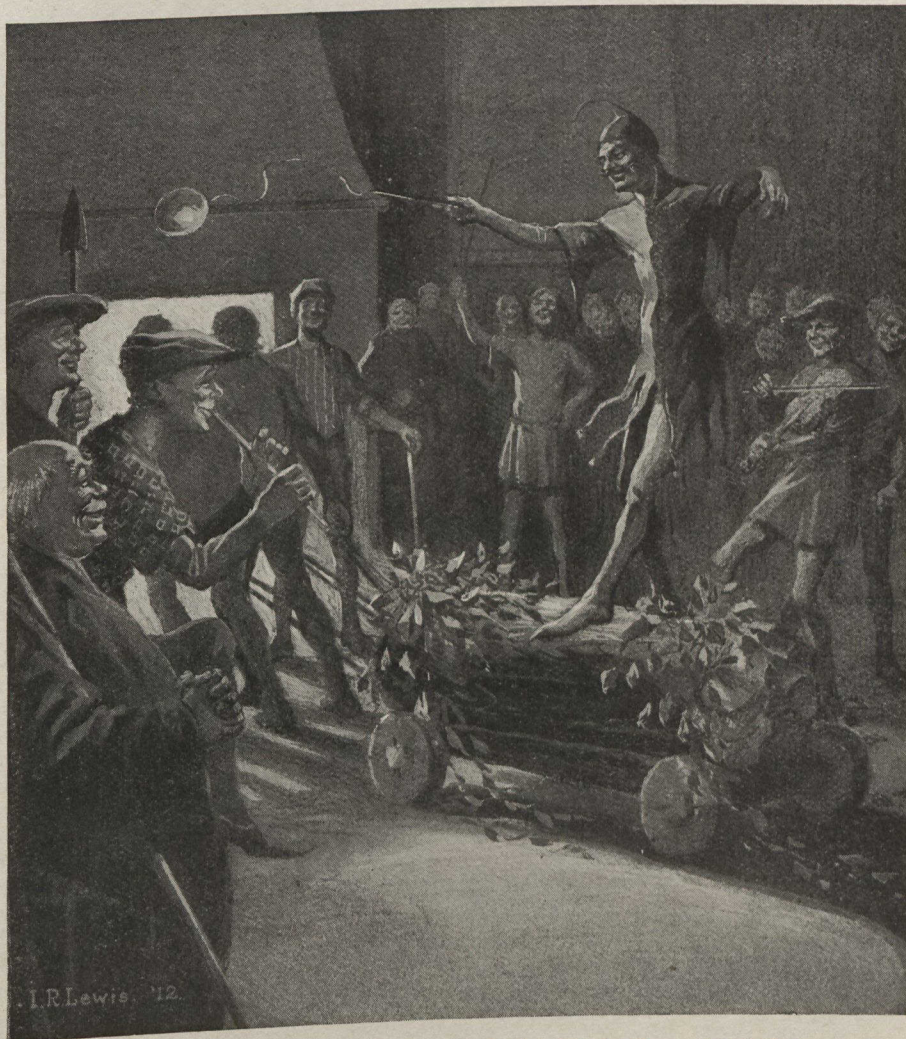
December 14, 1912

No. 2

THE YULE LOG

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Festival of Placing the Yule Log as Celebrated by our Saxon Forefathers.

AN old woman, past eighty, but still vigorous of long memory, sat in the dining-room of a rather defunct rural hotel last summer, and talked of

other days. A motor-car had gone past, killing one of her geese. Now she was oddly moved to remember things as they were when this old ramshackle of a house was a hotel kept by her husband in what was then a roaring saw-mill village.

She sat by what was once a heavy mantelpiece. And the shape of the old fireplace was still there—boarded up, cavernous and cold. She talked of the days when she had cooked meals for the loggers on that fire of crackling hardwood.

"Oh, we had to stop using it," she said. "It got to smoking. We had three in the house. They're all boarded up. Sometimes I hear the wind moaning down and the old blacks falling. I guess behind those boards there's a heap of rubbish that's come down all these years. My, how the martens do squabble in that old chimney! Beggars! they have it all to themselves now."

She remembered the first cook-stove brought along there by a pedlar; first her man ever bought, and what a marvel was that big wood-stove with the high oven on top; how much handier it was than the old fireplace once she got used to it, and—

But the reminiscences of the old woman would include the whole story of the decline and fall of the fireplace. And the close of her long life has seen the revival of the fireplace in Canada. Five miles from her walled-up fire-way she might have seen the modern country home of a townsman who has at least three roaring wood fireplaces. And in fifty years a country of great woods has gone from fireplaces out of date to fireplaces in fashion again; because it was the Saxon and the Norman and the Scandinavian that really invented the fireplace as the focus of family life. For confirmation of this see the Life and Times of Kris Kringle—who never could have got into a house by a stovepipe; and how he manages it now through a gas grate that hasn't the ghost of a flue, may be a marvel to many a young mind.

THE picture on this page is the real glorification of the fireplace in the placing of the Yule Log at Christmas—as it was in England centuries ago. It is a drawing of a Festival that took place in Canada only last Christmas at a place that shall be nameless. The mediaeval characters in costume were all present, even to the jester that rode on the Yule Log bedecked with vines. The fireplace shown there is one that was built only a year ago to revive the grand old custom of many folk sitting about a huge fire of real logs and cordwood. And the Yule Log shown in the picture sputtered and smouldered as a back-log for a week after it was rolled into place on the dogs. Once upon a time any bushwhack boy in Canada knew one wood from another almost in the dark. At least he could be sure of hickory and elm and birch and beech, just by feeling the scruff of the bark. And if he was hard put to it he could tell almost any kind of wood

by the grain, without looking at the bark. He knew by the shape of the tree even without examining the leaves. He was a wise boy; for he was born in the bush, and wood to him was as natural as clothes.

Times have changed. Of ten men in the room on Christmas Eve, nine have forgotten if they ever knew the lineaments of wood. The most they know about it—down here in the town and the city and the village—is that it costs nine dollars a cord.

But Uncle Henry, should he drop in from the farm, would take one look at the fireplace, spit once, and say,

"No, boys, that ain't real wood. That's only culls. It's just second-growth pole truck and saw-mill slabs. Listen to me and I'll tell yeh what real wood actilly wuz!"

Off he goes into a lingo that if set down as exhaustively as he tells it, would make a large book about back-logs and fireplaces. It's all A B C of memory to him. He's been round among his city nephews and daughters, and he knows all the dinky little cribs and crevices they have to resemble a real fireplace. He can tell you all about the hollow mockery of the gas grate that looks like a scraggy piece of wood, but "ain't." He can swear more

fluently about gas grates than anybody else, because he hates them worst. When it comes to the asbestos heater he's a perfect dictionary of bad talk. But when any of his near-fashionable relations ask him to haul a chair up to an electric-heater fireplace—well his face just crizzles up into concentrated disgust; he sulks and packs off into a corner and says,

"For the lordsake, lemme sit by the steam pipes or the hot-air chute, if yeh've got one. I'd rather. That thing? Say, I wouldn't be seen spitting into that. Not me!"

But of course Uncle Henry doesn't know much about modern civilization as expressed in the cost of fire. He forgets that people in town or out on the prairie don't have a bush lot where they can haul up wood-drags in the year 1912. He doesn't understand why we're all somehow sick of steam radiators and hot-air grates, and hanker to get back to the fireplace—even if it's only a gas grate or an electric heater. In fact he's a Back-logite, and I guess he's some pretty close relation to the old Saxon that on Christmas night helped to heave the Yule-Log on the fireplace that was big enough to bed a small horse and then have room for the dog.

AS for the old woman, whose reminiscences opened this chapter, the Christmas of 1912 being one of her very last should be a festival of good cheer. And so it would be, if one could only sit by the open fireplace remembering the old days of back logs. Her father was an Englishman. Her seven brothers were all men of the bush. They all helped to clear up a township. They all had fireplaces.

And to her the decadent little village with the defunct hotel and the boarded-up fireplace of her youth is a strange memory. Perhaps this Christmas she will sit before the

dead fireplace and think she sees again the glory of the open fire. She may remember the tremendous swagger of the sawlogs that came past higher than the horses in the sunlight and the storm. She will recall the snow-spattered loads that swung up there with the jingle of bells and the bawling of teamsters, stopping at the hotel. Standing by the open fire one long-coated Jehu could tell of the wild turkeys he was going to shoot for Christmas if this snow hadn't come, driving him out to the saw-logs. For the woods were full of more kinds of wild things in her young days than there were kinds of wood to heave into the fireplace. And the bushwhackers of the open fire were as big men as any of their Anglo-Saxon forbears of the Yule Log. They were stronger, more epical men, these giants of the bush that tore down the eternal trees and burned up logs by the acre to find room for the corn. Her own husband—he was a hard-knuckled, sometimes terrible, man that knew how to take down trees and load logs, and with his back to a wall take the come-on of seven men, any one of them almost as good as himself. And he got his strength from the trees, the skid road and the stump concession.

She remembers it all—moving pictures of a tremendous time in the making of Canada. And the boarded-up old fireplace is the focus of it all.